



# CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT AND ITS GENDER IMPLICATION IN PLATEAU STATE

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## ABSTRACT

Historically, relations between herders and sedentary farming communities have been harmonious. By and large, they lived in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship: herders' cattle would fertilise the farmers' land in exchange for grazing rights. But all of a sudden Clashes between different groups of Fulani herders and farmers erupted which led to lost of thousands of people in Nigeria over the past two decades. In 2014, more than 1,200 people lost their lives, according to the most recent Global Terrorism Index. The fighting is about some disagreements over the use of essential resources such as farmland, grazing areas and water between herders and local farmers as the major source of the fighting. Fulani herders travel hundreds of miles in large numbers with their cattle in search of pasture. The paper also try to look at some of the drivers which include: climatic changes (frequent droughts and desertification); population growth (loss of northern grazing lands to the expansion of human settlements); technological and economic changes (new livestock and farming practices); crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling); political and ethnic strife (intensified by the spread of illicit firearms); and cultural changes (the collapse of traditional conflict management mechanisms) and the research rely on secondary sources where books, periodic and journals were consulted, gender implication was discussed in order to explore the devastated conditions of women and children who become absolute widows and orphans, and finally consequences of the herders- farmers conflict was enumerated.

**KEYWORDS:** Herders, Farmers, Pastoralist and Agriculturalist, Gender and Conflict

## INTRODUCTION:

In West Africa, agriculture and pastoralism have coexisted side-by-side for centuries. Over time, many herding and farming communities in the same area have developed interdependent relationships through reciprocity, other ex-change, and support. At the same time, conflicts between herders and farmers have arisen for centuries. Recently, a small number of these disputes have escalated into widespread violence and displacement of people. In some cases, herder-farmer conflicts articulated with other ethnic, political, and religious conflicts. For example, in 2004, President Obasanjo of Nigeria declared a state of emergency in Central Plateau State, when herder-farmer conflicts resulted in "near-mutual genocide" of Christians and Muslims and more than 20,000 refugees fleeing to neighboring Cameroon. Because herder-farmer conflicts are often considered local, endemic, low-intensity conflicts and not wars, they have been largely ignored in the burgeoning literature on violent conflicts in Africa and elsewhere (e.g., Chabal, Engel, and Gentili 2005; Lind and Sturman 2002; Richards 2005). Herder-farmer conflicts not only have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved, they also disrupt and threaten the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production in West Africa. Ignoring these clashes is unwise because local conflicts may escalate into "real wars," argues Richards (2005:14), who writes that Burkina Faso may well be at the brink of ethnic violence along the "occupational boundary of farming and herding."

## BACKGROUND:

Historically, relations between herders and sedentary farming communities have been harmonious. By and large, they lived in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship: herders' cattle would fertilise the farmers' land in exchange for grazing rights.

The re-emergence of democratic rule in 1999 heralded a renewed conflicts and convulsions, ranging from ethnic crises, religious intolerance, political instability and proliferation of resource conflicts, absence of good governance as well as lack of development. Nation building continued to suffer from strong divisive forces of ethnicity, religion and natural resources conflict, which presupposes the weakening of national cohesion and integration (Maiangwa and Ahmadu, 2007).

Many communities of farmers and herders have built interdependent relationships with one another through emergent processes of exchange. Such interdependence has often been described as symbiotic, in which the two communities form host-client or host-stranger relationships with one another (Bassett 1986; de Haan, van Driel, and Kruithof 1990; Diallo 2000; Tonah 2006). A good example of a host-client relation is that between Mbororo herders and Gbaya farmers in the Adamawa Province of Cameroon (Burnham 1980). The basis of this long-term symbiotic relationship is reciprocity, which either party may initiate with small gifts of, for example, kola nuts and later exchange more substantive gifts and commodities.

Farmer-herder conflicts have existed since early beginning of agriculture in Africa (Fratkin, 1997). Nevertheless, its continued manifestation into violence against the backdrop of resource scarcity, increase in the population of resource users, lack of adequate grazing reserves and poor state of the existing

ones, unequal resource distribution and the consequent failure of patrimonial states, the region has been susceptible to antecedents of what Robert Kaplan (1994) described as the "coming anarchy". Farmer-herder conflicts are among the key manifestations of this anarchy and this is linked with the region's socio-economic and political ecology (Kaplan, 1994; Hussien, 1998; Shettima and Tar, 2008).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Clashes between different groups of Fulani herders and farmers have killed thousands of people in Nigeria over the past two decades. In 2014, more than 1,200 people lost their lives, according to the most recent Global Terrorism Index. The fighting is about some disagreements over the use of essential resources such as farmland, grazing areas and water between herders and local farmers as the major source of the fighting. Fulani herders travel hundreds of miles in large numbers with their cattle in search of pasture. They are often armed with weapons to protect their livestock (Aluko 2014). They frequently clash with farmers who consistently accuse them of damaging their crops and failing to control their animals. The Fulanis on the other hand say they are being attacked and their cattle stolen by bandits. And the conflict has serious devastating effect on women and children who rendered women as widows and children became unconditional orphans

The Fulani herdsmen respond that they are being attacked by gangs from farming communities who try to steal their cattle and they are just defending themselves. The clashes used to be confined to Nigeria's central region, with the mainly Christian Berom farming community in Plateau state engaging in retaliation killings with Muslim nomadic herders. But the continued effect of climate change on grazing lands has pushed the Fulani herdsmen further forward south in search of graze land and water. This has widened the scope of the conflict with deadly incidents being increasingly reported in southern parts of the country, raising fears that the violence could widen ethnic chauvinism and threaten the brittle unity that exists among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups (Aluko and Sayuti 2016).

## DRIVERS OF THE HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT:

For centuries, pastoralists drove their cattle east and west across the Sahel, the semi-arid zone south of the Sahara Desert that includes Nigeria's far northern belt. In the early 20th century, some herders started shifting their migratory routes farther south, pushed by a series of droughts in the far north, but also attracted by heightened security in central and southern Nigeria and by better control of parasitic diseases (such as trypanomiasis or sleeping sickness) in the central and southern zones. (Blench, R. 1994) Herders also wanted to evade the much-hated cattle tax (jangali) imposed by the British colonial government in the northern region. (Crisis Group interview) As cattle herds migrated southward, so did conflicts between pastoralists and farmers.

Among the principal causes and aggravating factors behind this escalating conflict are climatic changes (frequent droughts and desertification); population growth (loss of northern grazing lands to the expansion of human settlements); technological and economic changes (new livestock and farming practices);

crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling); political and ethnic strife (intensified by the spread of illicit firearms); and cultural changes (the collapse of traditional conflict management mechanisms). A dysfunctional legal regime that allows crime to go unpunished has encouraged both farmers and pastoralists to take matters into their own hands:

#### **Drought and Desertification:**

Nigeria's far north is arid and semi-arid, with a long dry season from October to May and low rainfall (600 to 900 mm) from June to September. In 2008, the National Meteorological Agency reported that over the preceding 30 years the annual rainy season dropped from an average of 150 to 120 days. In the last six decades, over 350,000 sq km of the already arid region turned to desert or desert-like conditions, a phenomenon progressing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year. (FME 2008) In Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states, estimates suggest that 50-75 per cent of the land area is becoming desert. (CPF 2013).

#### **Loss of Grazing Reserves:**

Most of the 415 grazing reserves established by the northern regional government in the 1960s have since been lost. Only 114 were formally documented or demarcated, though the government failed to back these agreements with legislation guaranteeing exclusive usage or take active measures to prevent encroachment. (Crisis Group interview) The rest succumbed to pressure from rapid population growth and the associated demand for farmland, were overrun by urban and other infrastructure, or appropriated by private commercial interests. (<https://unstats.un.org>).

#### **Changes in Pastoralism and Farming practices:**

Changing practices among both farmers and pastoralists have also strained relations. Over the last three decades, some cattle herders have gradually adopted sedentary lifestyles, leaving cattle herding increasingly to young men or boys, aged 9 to 25 years, who often lack the civility and maturity to resolve disputes amicably. (Crisis Group interview, )

#### **Rural Banditry and Cattle Rustling:**

Rural banditry also is driving herders south. (Mohammed J. Kuna 2015) Over the last decade, cattle rustling has grown in scale and organisation in several northern states where large bandit groups operate with mounting audacity. While this occurs throughout the north, the main theatres have been the Kamuku forest in Kaduna, Falgore forest in Kano, Dansadau forest in Zamfara and Davin Rugu forest stretching through Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara states. Cattle theft reportedly also has been a major source of funding for Boko Haram in the north east. (Crisis Group interview)

#### **Escalating Conflicts across Northern Nigeria:**

In recent decades, northern Nigeria's various conflicts also have displaced herders southward. (Crisis Group Africa Reports N°168) These conflicts – linked to poverty, inequality and religious extremism, have forced large populations to migrate, devastating local economies and livelihoods, including cattle rearing. In Borno state, the north east vice chairman of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), Alhaji Mafindin Danburam, claims association members lost over one million cattle to the Boko Haram insurgency. (Crisis Group interview) The economic losses and insecurity have compelled many herders to move south.

#### **Erosion of Traditional Mechanisms:**

In earlier decades, herders and community chiefs agreed on stock routes (burti or butali), sometimes under local government auspices. Disputes over wandering stock or damaged crops typically were resolved by village chiefs and herders' leaders (Ardos). (Crisis Group interview, 2016)

Those that defied the decisions of these community-level mediators were referred to local authorities. This system started crumbling in the 1970s, undermined by the involvement of the police and courts. Pastoralists hated these new institutions: corrupt police at times extracted fines and bribes while alien and protracted court processes immobilised their herds. Furthermore, local political leaders have tended to favour sedentary farmers, whose votes they crave, over itinerant herders, who may not be around at election time.

#### **CONSEQUENCES OF HERDSMEN FARMERS CONFLICT:**

**Loss of life and Human Insecurity:** One of the major consequences of the perennial conflict, attacks and counter-attacks between herdsman and farmers in Northern Nigeria is massive death toll of many innocent lives and actors involved in the conflict. Olayoku (2012) noted that between the year 2006 and 2014, Nigerian Watch database recorded 615 violent deaths related to cattle in the year 2006, 22 deaths were recorded after the herdsman farmers conflict in 2006, 54 in 2007, 31 in 2008, 83 in 2009, 39 fatalities in 2010 and a massive increase in death toll in 2011 which puts the figure at 116, 128 deaths in 2012, 115 deaths in 2013 and a total of 27 deaths was recorded in 2014. Similarly in the year 2013, Sunday Trust recorded a total of 300 deaths between January 1 and May 20 in the North Central states of Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kogi and Benue states respectively.

**Loss of Cattles and Farm Crops:** Another severe consequence of this conflict is

loss of cattle to conflict and bandits as many herds are lost during the conflict to angry farmers and bandits who take advantage of the conflicts to steal cattle from the pastoralists. On the side of farmers it is not uncommon to read about the destruction of crops on the farms and harvested products by the angry mobs of pastoralist. The negative effect of this is huge loss on both sides for these two actors as a result of loss of income and capital.

**Destruction of Properties:** Another effect of this conflict is destruction of farm properties and farm irrigation equipments, farming tools, houses and cars by angry herders who usually carry out organised violence as retaliatory act on the farming communities.

**Threat to National Unity:** The persistent attack by the herdsmen has called the attention of Nigerians to the threat it poses to Nigerian unity. Nigerian being a very ethnic conscious country that is polarised along ethno-religious lines is a very fragile and delicate union of culturally diverse ethnic groups. There is need to quickly address the forces that spreads division while at the same time promoting the forces of unity.

**Displacement:** Another lethal effect of this conflict is the displacement of people from their homes and community for safety reasons. This has become the persistent effect of the clash between herdsmen and farmers in North Central Nigeria

#### **GENDER IMPLICATIONS:**

The investigations conducted elsewhere show that 43 out of every 100 women affected by the internal armed conflict have been victims of different forms of violence based on their gender (UNDFW, 2005). In today's world, with some form of conflict in almost every region, more than 70 per cent of the casualties are civilians-most of them women and children (UNIFEM 2005). During conflict and reconstruction, the impact of horrific gender-based violence at societal, community and individual levels is a critical issue (UNICEF, 2005).

A lot has been said about the effects of the armed conflicts the world over. However, hereunder we review a few of the articles that we accessed on the web to give a brief insight into these effects. The effects are discussed under the headings: Displacement, widowed, Sexual abuse, other abuses and Socio-economic effects.

For women and girls, the impact is frequently magnified. The relatives of men killed in the violence often evict widows from their farmland. Moreover, post-conflict economic and social disenfranchisement renders women and girls even more vulnerable to sexual and economic predation.

**Sexual abuse:** According to Agustiana and Pakpahan (2004), civilian women and girls face different risks and dangers in armed conflict compared to those faced by civilian men and boys. There is a growing literature and attention to sexual violence and rape as a strategy of warfare. After incidences of sexual violence, women are often rejected by family or community.

**Socioeconomic implication:** Women who have lost their limbs may be unable to farm and are often abandoned by their husbands (Agustiana and Pakpahan, 2004). As members of the civilian population, women experience distinctive economic problems in armed conflict. In many cases women are separated from the men who traditionally may be their source of income. Lack of education and training, their role in caring for others, and general community attitudes make it extremely difficult for women to support themselves financially. In many cultures, moreover, it is women who have the most to gain from economic development, and are thus particularly disadvantaged when these resources are diverted during armed conflict.

**Widowed:** With men making up the majority of landmine casualties, women may be required to provide 'sole support for their families (Agustiana and Pakpahan, 2004). Even if women are not directly wounded during armed conflicts, the devastation suffered by their families and the threat of violence can contribute to women's isolation. Widowhood, flight to cities and remaining inside the home to avoid violence, all serve to break down social institutions and isolate women. Furthermore, the widowed women have no rights in claim land ownership after the death of the husband (Id21 Research Highlights, 2005).

**Health of the Women:** Women and girls also face health threats that stem from biological differences. For example, the physical vulnerability of women and adolescent girls is higher than that of men and adolescent boys due to their sexual and reproductive roles. Particular risks women face include STIs, including HIV/AIDS and "vesico-vaginal fistula, trauma, mutilation, complications from botched abortions, uterine problems, scarring of the vagina and problems having a normal sexual life or giving birth in the future" (Smith, 2002; UN, 2002). In a study on women's health in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime, interviewees attributed their depression to Taliban policies that restricted their movement, access to employment and education opportunities, and caused isolation, financial hardship and fear.

**Women as Head of Household:** Conflict has led to many women being widowed or separated, and therefore becoming the single head of household. The American Association of University Women (2007) in "The effects of war on

women" argues that women are gravely affected by conflicts. They are displayed, become heads of households; lose their resources since they often cannot own land or anything. They try to hold it together, but often are punished after the conflict is settled because of what they had to do to do this. Women are exposed to violence and abuse. They are preyed upon. They lose protection and freedom of movement; they are forced into marriages, forced to become combatants in army and militia. They are forced to have abortions, forced to be pregnant; they are detained and raped. The rape is not for pleasure but for control. When violence against women increases it is a sign of impending military conflict... It escalates during the war but continues after the conflict has died down.

#### **STEPS TO HELP ADDRESS THE HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT: Improve Security for Herders and Farmers:**

An immediate step is to improve security for both herders and farming communities. At a minimum, the federal government and its security agencies should intensify operations against cattle rustlers, improving systems to track livestock movement and trade, arresting individuals who carry illegal firearms and prosecuting suspected assailants.

#### **Strengthen police capacity to curb rustling and banditry:**

In recent years, the federal government and governments of some northern states have initiated several joint efforts against cattle rustlers and bandits. In July 2015, the governors of Niger, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina and Zamfara states jointly funded an anti-rustling operation in the Kamuku / Kuyanbana forests that straddle all six states. The operation involved four organisations: the army, Nigeria Police Force, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps and Directorate of State Security (DSS).

#### **Improve livestock tracking:**

Smarter animal tracking and identification systems can also curb cattle rustling. State ministries of agriculture should oversee cattle branding, certify cattle traders, monitor cattle markets and regulate abattoirs and slaughterhouses. The federal agriculture and transport ministries should renew efforts to establish safer and more efficient arrangements for transporting livestock across the country. Although a long-distance transportation arrangement, utilising the government-run rail system, was inaugurated in 2016, the effort was suspended shortly thereafter amid mutual accusations of bad faith and incompetence.

#### **Prevent attacks on farming communities:**

The federal government should follow through on promises to stop armed attacks on farming communities, especially in badly affected southern Kaduna and Benue states. To that end, federal security agencies – notably the police and Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps will need to focus on preventive measures, including community liaison mechanisms to upgrade intelligence gathering, early warning and rapid response.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, herders' farmers' conflict has really causes devastating effects on the life and properties of the affected communities. It also rendered the largest vulnerable groups' women and children in a very deplorable condition which total changed the tradition role of women to assumed new one which is household responsibilities as a result of their widower condition.

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